

STATEMENT OF

LISA PHILLIPS, PRESIDENT

WWII FAMILIES FOR THE RETURN OF THE MISSING

BEFORE THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY PERSONNEL

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

IMPROVING RECOVERY AND FULL ACCOUNTING OF

POW/MIA PERSONNEL FROM ALL PAST CONFLICTS

April 2, 2009

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the families and friends of over 78,000 World War II (WWII) service personnel still missing in action, I thank you for this opportunity to testify about “Improving Recovery and Full Accounting of POW/MIA Personnel from All Past Conflicts.”

With my deepest sincerity, I want to tell you that I “**wish**” I was not here today. Not that I wish I had not lost a relative in WWII, for we are very proud of his service and ultimate sacrifice, nor does my “wish” to not be here stem from the fact that my Uncle is one of 78,000 MIAs from WWII. My wish comes from the FACT that family groups such as WWII Families for the Return of the Missing (WWRM) should not have to exist. All relatives and friends of all U.S. MIAs should be confident that their government is working in an objective, fair and determined manner to ensure the code of “no one left behind” is being adhered to with the utmost urgency and dedication. I think you for trying to make this so.

As a relative of a WWII MIA and a member of an family support group that over the past 7 years has worked with thousands of MIA family members and every U.S. Government agency involved in MIA/POW recovery, I kindly request that you consider the following four points;

First, the three government organizations primarily responsible for POW/MIA recovery; Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and military service casualties offices are disjointed and do not effectively cooperate, often at times working against each other due to lack of a unity of command, “turf” wars and personality differences. While DPMO states they are the “portal” for all family members they do not have control over the individual records (service casualty holds these) nor do they control the research and recovery (a JPAC mission). A family member should not have to contact all three of these agencies individually just to receive a status on their case or the required records to conduct individual research.

Second, the entire process of MIA recovery is “politicized” by personnel within the U.S. Government agencies overseeing the research and recovery efforts as well as by individuals belonging to certain family support groups. These “alliances” are well known in the MIA recovery community but so far have effectively impeded all efforts to improve efficiency or equity.

Third, lack of Congressional oversight enables this inefficacy and politicization. The system is unable to correct itself. Too many people are too ingrained and their tentacles too long to allow effective and needed change. Ironically, some will justify the “lack” of a Congressional mandate as to why they can not conduct **initial** MIA site

research in Asia or Europe but then use that same mandate to justify why they are returning to the same site in Vietnam for the 3rd, 5th or 8th time. Only Congressional oversight will ensure efficiency, equity and objectivity.

Fourth, JPAC's manning and structure is inefficient. With an intelligence and research section of about 66 personnel, only 4 are assigned to WWII - one of who just resigned. Likewise, hundreds and hundreds of MIA remains go unidentified in the Lab due to shortages of forensic anthropologist. Not only is retention a problem in a place such as Hawaii, but there appears to be a problem with priority of effort. Forensic anthropologist are forced to split their time between field recoveries and lab identifications.

Every U.S. service member, past and present, lives by the code, "No one left behind." This code, is much more than a code - it is a promise and an obligation from our Government to those that have paid the ultimate price. We owe it to every service member and every family member – regardless of conflict to uphold this code. I ask you to please remember, this code, this promise, this obligation – has no expiration date.

Thank you.

Lisa Phillips
President
WWII Families for the return of the Missing